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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Brezhnev's Remarks on MBFR

(As of 12 Noon)

1. Soviet party chief Brezhnev's proposal Friday in Tbilisi to "start negotiations" on MBFR probably was keyed to the upcoming NATO ministerial meeting in Lisbon. The Soviets are aware that the US and others have cited Moscow's reluctance to engage in substantive discussions on MBFR as reason to move cautiously in responding to Moscow's let project for a conference on European security. Brezhnev's latest remarks appear aimed at shifting the burden of the dialogue to NATO.
2. His remarks add nothing to the substance of the existing Soviet position on MBFR. This, as spelled out by Brezhnev on 31 March at the 24th party congress, is merely that Moscow favors the reduction of "armed forces and armaments" in areas of dangerous confrontation, such as "central Europe." This formulation eliminated the restriction of reductions to "foreign forces" which had formed the basis of the Soviet position on MBFR since the Budapest conference of June 1970. The new formulation moved the Soviets into line with NATO conceptions of the subject.
3. The Soviets heretofore have shown no inclination to expand on this position in conversations with Western diplomats. The stock Soviet response to queries has been merely to affirm the "significance" of Brezhnev's remarks to the congress and to suggest that it is now incumbent on the West to frame a specific proposal.

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Brezhnev's latest remarks add little to this. He said only that the Soviet Union is "ready" to clarify any obscure points in its position, but indicated that such clarification would have to await the beginning of "negotiations." He thus left the ball clearly in the Western court.

4. It is not clear that the Tbilisi speech betokens a new Soviet interest in moving immediately to consideration of MBFR. Nor is it clear in what forum Moscow now proposes to conduct such negotiations. The past Soviet position has been that MBFR may be discussed either in an "organ" to be established at a Conference on European security (CES) or in "any other forum" acceptable to all interested parties. They have qualified this, however, by insisting that a CES should precede discussion of "complex" problems such as MBFR. There is nothing in Brezhnev's latest remarks to suggest that Moscow has dropped this qualification.

5. It is likely that Brezhnev's remarks were prepared in advance of Senator Mansfield's amendment proposing a unilateral reduction of US forces in Europe. They seem to be a logical continuation of the position formulated at the 24th Congress and affirmed subsequently by Soviet officials rather than an effort to take into account the new circumstances created by the Mansfield move.

6. There does not appear to be any direct connection between Brezhnev's remarks on force reductions and the routine message of greetings to the Czechoslovak party which congratulated Prague for having "returned the situation in public life and development of the national economy to normal." Although the stay of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia has been publicly linked to the attainment of "normalization," the Soviet-Czechoslovak status of forces agreement of 1968 officially ties the presence of Soviet troops to defense against "the increasing revanchist strivings of the West German militarist forces." In addition, Brezhnev in substance had already used similar language at the 24th Congress, where he congratulated the Czechoslovaks for having "successfully coped" with their difficulties.